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Aesthetic Description and Realism in Art Education

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In its appeal to common sense it is easy to imagine that the preferred object of study in art education would be one derived from a realist metaphysics of art. However, the intuitively identifiable properties which would appear on the surface to make real art works seem so accessible have proved inappropriate for the accommodation of aesthetic and representational qualities. This paper looks at the usefulness of a stable realism for questions related to the description and understanding of art works and briefly explores two theories which the author believes promise to resolve the antagonism between representational meanings and their assertion as true properties of the work.

The explanatory power of descriptions is largely determined by their capacity for representing objects convincingly and significantly to belief. What we know in the aesthetic or otherwise by way of description is largely determined by the manner in which our descriptive representations have been circumscribed. One of the most demoralising intuitions art teachers have arises from the suspicion that what can be said about the aesthetic character of objects, in particular art objects, will in many instances turn out to be self evident and relatively trivial (see Scruton (1974) pp. 37-70). For this reason art teachers, trying to verbalize aesthetic quality, often find themselves diverted into indirect kinds of description. As a result aesthetic descriptions in the arts can end up with little explanatory or assertorial strength.

Kinds of Aesthetic Description

Descriptions may be ostensively intended. Ostensive descriptions function as signposts which point out the properties and qualities of things. Ostensive description is exemplified in Beardsley's (1958) concept of local and regional qualities, with its neutral terminology of parts and wholes. Signposting aesthetic qualities, however, is far removed from the simple idea of a spatio-temporal index implied in the concept of a map. For example, many artworks are platforms for the transaction by their audiences of varied and overlapping narratives. So that unless the aesthetic characteristic being described is tractable to mere appearance, or the notion of ostension is extended to include some kind of explanation, the feeling of self evidence in aesthetic description is likely to persist.

A description may take on the form of a highly imaginative allusion. In its suggestion of the richness and power of aesthetic quality, allusion taps into the varied personal but unlegislated responses of the writer, in the form of graphic reports. However reports of this sort can easily mistake a misunderstanding for a description. Thus allusory descriptions may turn out to be difficult to accept as believable representations of common experience. In other words, the subject relativism of allusory description can work against the propagation of knowing. An example of a more believable allusion in description occurs in Michael Parsons' (1987 p. 119) interview with Maureen, an undergraduate who was asked as part of Parsons' cognitive study, to describe the dog in a detail depict-

ing a woman and a dog in Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. She said, 'The kind of feelings you have for your own animal, a kind of love that is more part of the family . . . It gives you a good feeling, and it doesn't leave you wondering what it is. (p. 119)

However, if this description expressed an aversion to animals, it may have been as equally valid but less believable.

Descriptions can also take on the form of rhetoric. Rhetorical descriptions depend largely upon injunctions of value and upon evangelical appeals aimed at pricking the aesthetic (ethical) conscience of the reader. But rhetorical descriptions can easily mistake deception for understanding. With rhetorical description there is always a lingering uncertainty whenever it appears that faith is displacing experience as the basis for belief.

Factual descriptions, those entailed in problematic and modal kinds of assertion, are also inappropriate for the explanation of aesthetic character in artworks. To be acceptable as fact, descriptions depend upon being grounded in the most uncontentious properties of the object. But as aesthetic and representational characteristics of objects are secondary qualities, they do not share a regular or predictable relation with their primary bases. For example, the 'serenity' of a yellow used in a Vermeer, may turn to 'foreboding' as ostensibly the same yellow is presented in a Van Gogh. Thus aesthetic descriptions cannot be built up by drawing necessary relationships with more primitive and doubt free properties like color, line, or shape. Deprived of a descriptive logic (or criterion) for their characterizations, writers are denied a claim of factuality for their work. Aesthetic description must somehow go on to deal with an object's qualities more directly.

Another kind of descriptive indirectness arises out of a belief in the inherent conventionality and historicity of the aesthetic in art (Goodman 1976; Wollheim 1980; Wolff 1984; Foucault 1970). Historicists and conventionalists adhere to the broad position that the aesthetic character of artworks is implicated in the representational frameworks which transfigure them. Examples of this position include among others, the two great explanatory formal systems of semiology and social (critical) theory.

Conventionalists would appear to have an explanatory edge in their description of the qualitative world. In conventionalist description a power of explanation is achieved through the establishment of a model like relation between the socially determinate, or structural frameworks chosen by the writer; and the aesthetic character of the object. Where conventional kinds of description differ from other kinds lies in the strength of their interpretative power. Their power is derived from the assimilation of descriptive quality to a more generalized system or, in the case of history, to empirical sources. In other words aesthetic description is identified by conventionalists with explanations based on an instancing in the object of some more general and external idea. Conventionalists, however, attract the opposition of those who see the aesthetic as distinctly qualitative and concerned with singling out the unique value of an object. Anti-conventionalists believe the cognition of singular objects requires an immediate prehension of their character.

What if the description of an artwork is derived from the interaction between spectator and work (Holland 1981, p. 118) or from the product of a social group and the work? The reduction of artworks to objects of sociology or psychology tends to trade away art as a separate identity and possibly relinquishes the field

itself.

Janet Wolff (1984, pp. 60-61) acknowledges how all ideologies of art are engaged with 'aesthetic mediation' and how the critical, aesthetic reconstruction of the art object represents a preconditioning and thus a distinctive element in the social and psychological explanation of art. For example, even an explicit Marxist goal of reuniting students with their material bases through art does not necessarily involve the political activist in a material transfiguration of the art object. Bourgeois aesthetics with its expressive and elitist ideology is readily acknowledged by Marxists themselves to be one of the most powerful and preferred agencies of social change. The movie *The Grapes of Wrath* met all of Hollywood's marketing conditions yet was for this reason able to effect changes upon social consciousness. Artistic identity would seem at least to retain its precedence and its separateness even within the context of political materialism. Thus art, although an agent of society, is not agreed to be merely so. As pointed out above in relation to formalist systems, descriptions of artworks are not simply interchangeable with explanations of their social dynamics.

Bourdieu (1987), a socio-historicist, points out how the artworld in the twentieth century has reached such a thorough going historicism, it has become such an integrated field of conventions, that it can claim a kind of internal relativity of norms. The art world is now able to offer itself as a unified force to socio-historical study. He states:

The result is that, contrary to what is taught by a naive relativism, the time of art history is really irreversible and that it presents a form of cumulativeness. . . . What happens in the field is more and more linked to the field's specific history and to it alone. It is therefore more difficult to deduce it from the state of the general world at the given time (as a certain "sociology," unaware of the specific logic of the field, claims to do). Adequate perception of works . . . is a differential, a diacritical perception: in other words it is attentive to deviations from other works, both contemporary and past. The result is that, like production, the consumption of works which are a product of a long history of breaks with history, with tradition, tends to become historical through and through, and yet more and more totally dehistoricised. (p. 208)

Structuralist explanations can also create explanatory *cul de sacs* in aesthetic description. These are nicely encapsulated in Jameson's (1972) phrase 'The Prison House of Language.' The assumption that the aesthetic character of artworks is explainable through reference to the linguistic structure of their representational systems, is misleading. In the Gardner/Winner (Winner, 1982) structuralist psychology for example, aesthetic characterizations of the drawings and paintings of young children are largely interpreted against semiotic criteria derived from Goodman's (1976) *Languages of Art*. Where Goodman's (aesthetic) symptom of 'repleteness' is used as a measure of children's sensitivity to the aesthetic, the inferences drawn are categorical. For the purposes of the study (Winner 1982, p. 171) subjects were to complete a drawing task. The study was structured in such a way that subjects were led into the presupposition of repleteness as a disguised solution to the task. The study effectively sorted subjects against the criterion of repleteness it appears, but in doing so said little about the character of their responses. It is obvious that subjects' responses are not characterized aesthetically by the theory of repleteness;

rather their responses become instances of repleteness. They serve to endorse the generalisability of semiotic theory whose assumptions, of course, it was never the study's intent to question. In aesthetic description, however, the role of structuralist interpretation must be to tell us more about the significance represented than about the theory behind the belief. Structuralist interpretations, one suspects, continually postpone explanations of the work to concentrate on the justification of their own mechanisms. Evidence for this is suggested in Levi-Strauss' conclusion that myth is about the mythological process (Jameson 1972, p. 198), and in Goodman's (1976) conception of expression as self denotation. Formalist systems of explanation tend to beg the question of aesthetic and representational description in the visual arts.

Wittgenstein (Hagberg 1987, p. 252; Wollheim, 1980) expresses the problem of systematic explanation in the arts as a difference between transitive and intransitive description. Transitive descriptions are explanatory but concerned with 'what a thing has.' What a work has can be separated externally from the work. But what is external is mistakenly believed to suffice as a legitimate form of aesthetic explanation. For example, saying what mood a work *has* entails the use of predicates which function as descriptive translations of the work into external 'feeling/mood' systems of explanation.

Satisfactory aesthetic descriptions on the other hand, are intransitive, that is they are comprehensive of the work. Their object is to keep the work embodied and informed. All of the great formal systems of interpretation have difficulty in accommodating the intransitive character of both myth and art. Aesthetic description derives its truth *within* rather than *from* its analysis into a system.

This small sample exposes some of the variations in approach to aesthetic description and hints at the difficulties associated with their varying explanatory power. However the difficulties are merely a symptom of the way deeper assumptions held about the nature of existence in art dictate the form of aesthetic descriptions.

Existence, Realism, and Description in Art

In exploring the concomitance between descriptions of artworks and the nature of their representational and physical existence I believe that advantages can accrue for visual arts education from the adoption of a stable realism. Stability however, depends upon being able to resist the tendency of writers and teachers in the arts to replace, in the name of description, one kind of object for another. This tendency is always possible, especially with the use of interpretations based on formal systems, because each formal system carries its own differing ontological presuppositions. Thus a stable realism is one that entails descriptions of works relative to their independently existing properties. It is one where descriptions can be made without resort to ontological excursions outside of realism, even for the description of qualities of a work appearing to fall within a special class. For example, the reconciliation of the emergent with the physical in a work. To retain the identity of art as a field I will stress the importance of being able to point to advantages for the existence of a real artwork. Where in a real artwork true descriptions of all the work's potential properties can be identified without resort to its entire transfiguration as an object.

Knowing in the visual arts is closely associated with the mostly tacit ontological positions taken by knowers towards works. Yet in the most practical way policies taken by art teachers towards the identity of artworks are crucial to the

conditions which govern descriptive explanations. Art teachers are never tacitly indifferent to the question of artistic identity even if they may appear to be demonstrably so. The way identity is conceived by teachers can, for example, either preclude or mandate attitudes and beliefs about works chosen for study. For example, structural or semiological objects represent conventionalist assumptions. Thus to replace a structural with a phenomenalist or idealist object, for example, is to exchange a cognitive for a sensory aesthetic with the possibility of far reaching effects upon the content and methods chosen in the art curriculum. There is no certainty that an artwork would continue to be as valuable structurally as it was phenomenally, if taken from these differing points of view. Visual arts curriculum makers already swap around their interpretative systems and thus their related ontologies. Teachers are motivated by what they believe to be the lure of wider descriptive opportunities afforded in various areas of contents by one formalist system (purporting to be universal) over another. For example, the causal object in studio practice is exchanged for the object of Marxist contextualism in art history, which in turn, is exchanged for the phenomenal object of aesthetic appreciation. The opportunism of object exchange reaches its most vivid expression in the polemics of higher education. The sub-disciplines of the visual arts mark out their various college territories by redrawing the identity of the art object. The positivist materialism of the art object, as it is investigated in the behavioural sciences, is barely recognizable beside the phenomenism of student works stacked away in the studios of art departments; while social historians see the aesthetic as a quaint but romantic 19th Century aberration.

In the microcosm of the art room, school students may be cosseted as alternately bourgeois and Marxist within the time frame of the one lesson for the simple reason that, as a platform for the descriptive explanation of a particular area of content, one system is perceived to be more explanatory than another. Entreated one minute to originate with all the freshness of the *avant garde*, students are exposed the next minute to video clips of John Berger pointing out how Rembrandt was a mere pawn of ruling Dutch 17th Century ideology.

When used in the description of art works the self absorption of formalist systems and their general nature beg most of the questions of aesthetic and representational interpretation. The exchange of one kind of object and its related formalisms for another is a trivial form of explanation (Boullart, 1985). It is also pernicious, for it commits the learner in the visual arts to descriptions which reduce the individuality of works to the level of analytical dogma. The mere translation of the work into an alternative system is not necessarily to afford it an effective aesthetic description. Rather it tends to reduce the individuality of the work to the level of a general instance. Denied the reaffirmation of the aesthetic in each individual work the value differences between professional and vernacular judgements in description are diminished and differences between works levelled (see Adorno 1984, pp. 466-467). But the use of systematic explanations is also a category mistake. Devitt (1984, pp. 80-83) and Putnam (1975, pp. 223-227) identify the mistake as a confusion between narrow and wide beliefs, or between intentional and functional states of the believer. Their point is that the assimilation of belief to wider structures *about* the conceptual value of belief (or intentional thought) provides the knower with little opportunity to 'attribute any richer meaning or content to a sentence in

thought' (Devitt, p. 82). He continues, 'for to suppose otherwise is to think that an intrinsic property of an object can determine its relation to a particular object external to it' (p. 83).

The feelings of disquiet expressed in De Chirico's images of deserted and shadowy arcades, for example, is not directly proportional in intensity to one's theoretical grasp of the concept of disquietude. Nor is it a function of behavioral accounts of psycho and socio-phobic neurosis in public places. Nor is it mere recognition or 'seeing as.' Amplification of a felt quality such as disquiet in a work and its refinement into the recognition of 'disquiet,' is deeply involved in the precision with which it is translated into an identifying description. The interesting interaction of 'concept,' 'recognition,' and 'experience' (the acute feeling itself) in aesthetic comprehension represents the praxiology of aesthetic description. In the very multiplicity of its representations to consciousness, the interaction effects a kind of cross check, a triangulation that audits one mental representation against another, thus laying down for feeling a place in belief. It suggests, I believe, that aesthetic properties such as a sense of disquiet in a work exist independently as the judgement of true components of real objects and not as projections or anything else (see Scheffler's demystification of truth in metaphor [1988, pp. 45-50]).

Aesthetic Character as Real Properties

Although a philosophy of mind must show how conceptual understanding operates in the recognition of aesthetic properties, the task is dependent upon an account of how the former is mediated objectively into the latter, for it is clear that there is no implication for concepts in feeling. Thus an account of aesthetic description (and I have been including in 'the aesthetic' all senses related to the function of representation in art) must include an explanation of how aesthetic properties are able to be real assertions. (The relationship of realism to questions of: multiple works, endurance over time, coming into and out of existence, authorship, physicalism, and other issues related to the object will be set aside for now).

Inductive, formalist description in the Broudyan (1972) tradition, justified by 'foundationalist' sense data, has little to contribute to an account of the sensuous nature of the aesthetic in objects. We accept that the perception of sensuous (felt) qualities, such as 'disquietude' referred to above, involve a conceptual background of understanding. (I acknowledge that the identification of a quality of 'disquiet' may lie outside the cognitive range of students at differing stages of development. However, I do not intend to address here the particular question of developmental cognition in aesthetics.) Sensuous qualities are not immediately apprehended even if they are supervenient on their pictorial properties. Thus aesthetic description is both articulated by and dependent upon an extension in the knower of ideas already in place and which have been shown to represent true properties elsewhere. It is a view which can be explained as 'foresight' (see Margolis 1984, p. 228). We accept with continental philosophy that:

We do not have a conception of things we have a fore-conception of them [which is to say] (1) the function of our concepts depends on a prior conceptual orientation which is in effect our history; (2) it is for that reason only that things are interpretable at all; and (3) the attempted recovery of such fore-conception cannot itself fail to be similarly encumbered: "An interpretation" says Heidegger, "is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us." (p. 228)

Art teachers concerned with teaching aesthetic understanding, however, have the problem of deciding where to break into the perceptual cycle of the student. Cognitive studies into stages of aesthetic development (e.g., Parsons 1987) tentatively indicate the characteristic entry points for aesthetic intervention. But ontology and epistemology should not be conflated. Historicist insights into the role of fore-conception in aesthetic understanding do not go so far as to require an object which is dependent upon knowledge for its existence.

Realism does not make the very existence of an entity dependent upon how we are able to *tell* it exists (Devitt 1984, p. 43). Realist descriptions are concerned with identifying the facts which an art object shares between it and its identity, that is, those properties which are true of the work. But students must be able to recognize rather than 'identify' the identity of a painting because artworks acquire their identity contingently. For example, 'such and such' is *Blue Poles* by Pollock. There are no properties implied in the identity of an artwork like *Blue Poles*. Its identity is stipulated, and it exists. In other words it is, by virtue of being referred to. Its existence if not logically composed is a deduction from a bundle of abstract properties (Kripke, 1972, p. 273). The identity of the work is fixed and thus registered as a singular reference.

All students can recognize the identity of an artwork. *Blue Poles* is a work which most people in Australia know. However the epistemic level at which people know the work, that is *how* it is identified, varies widely. Indeed in a famous scandal in Sydney an exhibition of fraudulent Jackson Pollock paintings escaped exposure only because the properties of the works were widely acknowledged to be indistinguishable from Pollock's. Yet the works were simply not real Pollocks. When their *real* identities were revealed, all that was previously acknowledged of them carried little weight in defence. Thus what is true of a work must also be true of its identity but does not necessarily constitute its identity.

Of the properties shared by a work and its identity, students may be widely ill-informed or naive. Yet it is not fatal to the continued existence of a real artwork that the properties it has are ill-defined, misidentified, misunderstood or even lie undiscovered. The artwork retains its existence irrespectively of what was, is, or can come to be known about it. Thus a real artwork has a robust presence for students which can be approached epistemically without any permanent damage to its existence. The work may not be, to begin with, part of a student's *habitas*, as Bourdieu (1987) would say, but *habitas* seems like another way of talking about learning, a learning concerned with inculcating the esoteric rather than the exoteric.

Subsequently we can begin teaching about the work. Supervenient terms, that is terms relating to secondary and representational qualities, are usually shared common place terms without any precise criteria of shared meaning. However this is precisely why artworks and their study have become a field of practice. The field represents a context with its own conventions and norms for the arbitration of meanings which it may be possible to transmute as properties of the work. The true properties which identify an artwork are not unique. The pictorial property of blue and the aesthetic property of 'disquiet' are shared by many other objects. But the configuration of these properties begins to take on a comprehensive significance, a kind of emergent factuality which is local to the work. For the realist, though, the independent existence of the object, which appeals so compellingly to common sense, is not to be identified as the thing 'in

itself.' A real object requires descriptive mediation, the arbitration of a criterion to determine the truth of its properties and enable them to be reliably identified. But unfortunately the 'emergent factuality' of artworks, particularly their representational character, (subject matter expressed as the internal logic of the work, its *verstehen* as Adorno, 1984, p. 475 describes it) renders the theoretical use of concepts, the language of natural kinds, inappropriate.

Realists are unable to rely on theory as a criterion of truth about artworks in the way they do with natural kinds such as trees, planets, cats, and so on (Wiggins, 1978, p. 56). This is because there can be no such thing as a natural law governing a contingent and individual configuration like an artwork. Yet it seems patent that despite its emergent character the aesthetic remains assertible in description as properties of the work. But it is equally clear that the notion of a quality as both emergent *and* an independent property of an object sets up a contention difficult to reconcile within a realist philosophy of mind. What is the possibility of conciliation between the two?

Putnam (1983, p. 207) argues that the idea of a descriptive mediation in the stronger correspondence sense (correspondence realism) between mind independent (real) sets of properties, and *special* signs in a language, is unacceptable. Reference between words and properties is contingent. There are infinite ways, Putnam says, that we can specify a correspondence between terms and their referents. He argues:

how can we pick out correspondence between our words (or thoughts) and the mind independent thing if we have no direct access to the mind independent things? (p. 207)

We are according to Putnam, in need of some bridge between property and mind. But Putnam is denying us a correspondence, is also denying us a ready made world of preexistent properties, in other words, denying us a metaphysical realism. Where then do properties originate?

Following Putnam (1983, p. 262), when we choose to represent the state of some system S, we choose to institute a frame relative to which S has a determinate property of being Q or of being P. For example, in a painting S we may choose to institute the alternative frames Q or P which, let us say, refer to the expressive character of sadness or wistfulness. But we only choose to fill one of these otherwise idle frames. The frames do not determine the property in some metaphysical sense (Scheffler, 1976, p. 41). Sadness is a metaphorical hypothesis, a speculative coalition of meanings in the form of an experience or idea, for which the frames function more as literal reference points or quantitative values. Hypotheses about sadness, for example, are felt in response to observation, even though observation is constrained as fully categorized by its liberal frames.

In the context of painting S the frames being P or being Q, functioning as descriptive categories, do not disabuse us of the freedom to apprehend but rather, within the connotation of meaning they extend, enable us to be realists when we do apprehend. Indeed if we are wrong about the sadness, rather than the system and its frames, it is our observation within the frames that would show us the error. Rather than a reduction to essences, or of some correspondence to reality, the descriptive scheme we select represents choices relative to the facts we are interested in (or as Parsons [1987] would add, we are at a cognitive stage to understand). It is what Putnam (1987) calls 'internal realism' . . . a view that takes our familiar common sense scheme, as well as our scientific

and artistic and other schemes at face value, without helping itself to the notion of the thing in itself' (p. 17).

Realism and the Reliability of Aesthetic Description

We are still left with the problem of the way we condition our choices reliably in aesthetic comprehension. What guides do we have in the selection of our references that can satisfy conditions of assertibility relative to aesthetic character and are compatible with an objective realism? Two promising directions in which these conditions might be found are those set out in papers by Wiggins (1978) and Petit (1987).

Wiggins' Concept of Authentic Effect

Wiggins (1978, p. 56) echoes Putnam's internal realism when he talks about the conditions involved in maintaining what he calls the 'authentic effect' of an artwork. Wiggins maintains that there is a real 'effect' discernible in the artwork, an effect which shares an identity with the character of each work. The real effect is traceable through the identifiability of the artist's purpose (theory or policy). The artist's purpose cannot be characterized in causal terms. The effect is not expressible in terms of the experience felt, in other words, as an effect on the viewer; but in the 'effect' of the work. The effect is instrumentally, constitutively, and materially related to the devices and calculations (the scheme) used by the artist. An artwork is an independently discoverable configuration in which the material and conceptual choices constitutive of it serves to identify its representational system. The artwork is its purposeful constituents. An artwork, Wiggins claims (p. 60), acquires its identity because we as spectators are able to objectify its constituents from the perspective of an insider experiencing its authentic effect. We are able to do this because we participate in the artist's game plan as projections of his/her ideal audience. The artist's work anticipates our experience; this is the tangibility of its authentic effect.

For Wiggins, Putnam's choices relative to facts are the artist's choices relative to effect. Note that we are not speculating from the work according to some psychoanalytical model about the artist's subliminal motives. We are trying instead to reconstruct an explanation of the work as a result of our comprehension of artistic policy, that is the artist's constitutive theory of the work. The work is calculated constitutively, materially, and instrumentally to accrue a dynamic and singular effect because it is gained against a background of artistic purpose in which we as spectators share. Thus the artwork becomes describable as a kind of individual system regulated by the artist, the work, and the audience (pp. 61-65).

In this way, Wiggins believes (pp. 64-65) we escape the platitudes of self evident description and enter into an Hegelian idea where a work's sensuousness is constituted as a dialogue of like minded choices revealed and judged among audiences and artist as the constituents of the work.

There are problems with Wiggins' realism. The major problem relates to his notion of sensuousness. Many aesthetic or secondary qualities are not easily reduced to explanations of purpose, or described as properties in the constitutive terms that claim to be a theory of that purpose. For Wiggins the theoretical power of description, used in the explanation of natural kinds, is paralleled in the theoretical description of artistic purpose which, he claims, serves in the identification of individual artifacts like artworks. But mere identification of the facts relative to both artwork and its purpose is not sufficient enough as theory to act as a reference class able to govern the objectivity of aesthetically

emergent 'effects.'

Petit's Theory of Rectification and Positioning

Petit (1987) as a realist believes that pictures, for example, only display their aesthetic character suitably as properties when their properties can be assigned to an appropriate reference class. To place an object in the appropriate reference class is done, he believes, by subjecting the object imaginatively to various positionings so that the observer comes to apprehend the appearance of things objectively. But identification is achieved only in so far as the perceiver knows what the relevant contrasts are: '... one succeeds in making the picture display the appearance of ... [x].' (p. 31). Petit (p. 37) introduces two constraints on imaginative positionings. These moves are designed to audit imaginative positionings and lend property-like strength to what would otherwise be something little different to aspectival seeing or 'seeing as' (Wittgenstein, 1952; Aldrich, 1963; Scruton, 1974). To qualify as assertible truth the perception of an aspect of the aesthetic, for example, sadness, disquiet, or some other representational characteristic, must be referenced against appropriate and relevant background information. Petit calls this 'rectification' (p. 37).

Rectification involves the placement of properties into their normalised reference class. The process of rectification is straight forward with pictorial properties like colour. Not only can I gain access to a standard presentation of 'red,' which reliably enables me to adjudicate an elusive or ambiguous case of 'red,' but the quality of red if expressed as an assertion by someone else can be accepted as true (knowledge). If rectification is successful, assertions can be accepted at face value without the reader's first hand knowledge of the truth, *de dicto* as opposed to *de re* knowledge of a property. In other words, not only would I know that red *de re*, but I would also have 'knowledge that red' *de dicto*.

The notion of adjudication is crucial because it determines whether a work really does have (as a property) a perceptual quality (e.g. of sadness) or not. What, for example, if a work possessed a quality of sadness in its gestalt that a given audience was unable to perceive (experience)? To where would they be referred in order to see the sadness? The question serves to highlight indirectness of aesthetic description as an issue of crucial importance to the notion of learning and instruction in the visual arts. Aesthetic qualities, Petit says, are 'essentially perceptual or perceptually elusive' (p. 34) and as a result have no standard reference class. A *de dicto* statement about disquietude would encourage little belief because it attracts no common references. Simply, there is no criterion of sadness, and thus no truth claims can be proposed for sadness in a work.

Petit shows that for two pictorially identical artworks the aesthetic quality they represent remains the same. Thus an interdependence contrast is set up between the constituents of the work and the qualities supervenient upon them. It is this interdependence that Petit calls the aesthetic reference class, and it is to this reference class that an aesthetic quality is rectified. Rectification can be compared with Scruton's (1974) idea of pictorial realism. Scruton says, 'Realism is always realism in a certain aspect because,' he continues, 'not every feature I see in a work is a feature of its appearance' (pp. 202-204). Secondary qualities for Scruton are not seen through primary qualities but *seen as* an aspect. Thus Petit's theory of rectification is an attempt to lend assertibility to Scruton's unasserted reports of aspectival experience. But we have already seen that there is no implication for secondary in primary qualities of a work. The

representational in the aesthetic is, according to Petit:

by reference to something which may change from case to case. It requires only normal information and memory to position an object appropriately for colour; it requires imagination to position it so that it displays a property like sadness. (p. 31)

We cannot wait for the work to explain sadness as if we, through reflective effort, could squeeze it out as an essence. As Kripke (1972, p. 253) would say in reference to secondary qualities in general — any changes to them are not expressed by reference to some internal essence of 'sadness' or anything else, but by changes to the way they, as references, are marked out in context. Secondary qualities, unlike natural kinds, have no facts about *them* to be known. Thus their truth is a condition of their context, that is, their affirmation or denial by the positioning effect which throws them into contrast with their surroundings.

As Danto (1964) explains, two identical objects, one real but a natural kind, the other an art kind, can only be distinguished by the transfiguring constraints of an informed perception. We take sadness and, for some imaginative reason, elect to re-reference the work or, reconstruct it as sadness. But the arbitrariness of Kripke's renaming, and the cryptic nature of Danto's theoretical transfiguring, seem to take us too far away from the sense of rectification as 'positioning' in context. Positioning suggests, in other words, that the work as a complex conditions the property; that is, the whole work acts as reference class to that property which, as Putnam says, we are interested in (sadness, disquiet etc.).

Petit (p. 35) explains that constraints upon positioning can be conceived as both 'holistic' and 'humanistic.' Holistic constraints are produced through the interactive effect of one property upon all its partners. A property, from its position within one reference class, highlights certain others. A representation of a woman in a picture for, example, 'naturally effects how it [the representation] may be positioned with a view to displaying economy, lavishness, dreaminess or matter-of-factness, sadness or gaiety' (p. 35). Any given positioning that fails to make coherent sense of the whole or any part of the picture is thus wrong or inappropriate. Petit appeals to rational intuitions in order to gain a sense of truth and objectivity for the act of positioning (see Dancy 1985, Ch. 8, for an introduction to the coherence theory of truth, and again Adorno 1984.).

But Petit is careful to acknowledge the historical perspectivism embedded in the way art understands itself as a coherent form. The humanistic constraint on indiscriminate positioning considers the way art works tend to resolve themselves into the intellectual milieus shared by their audiences. This tendency, Petit points out, does not try to presuppose artist's motives, but perceives the work, 'as something intelligible that a human being should have produced' (p. 35). Like Wiggins, Petit sees a rationality among the constituents (the properties) of the work that can only be contemplated in the broad sense as the emergence of an artistic intentionality. But milieus can also be conceived in relation to a diacritical artworld. From a diacritical perspective positioning can be seen as an editing of representational meaning against a perception of the way meaning deviates from present and past representations in earlier works, that is, from the conventions of representation. The recognition of these is as much a part of the uptake of the work as anything else. It helps show why an esoteric or specialized knowing of the artworld is important to an understanding by students of the otherwise deceptively common place subjects of art. Thus

the audience is perceptually conditioned by the work to anticipate what was tolerably believable within it, a sort of internal logic. With acquaintanceship, and within these parameters, the spectator's understanding of the work can become increasingly precise.

For a successful realism, the description of the individual character of works is quite consistent with their being critically assertible fact. In this way realism can combine the power of truth with the writing of aesthetic description and effect the inculcation of aesthetic understanding while disengaging its existence from the necessity of truth.

In summary a real artwork has an intuitively separate existence, and the worlds and qualities it represents are its properties. If all of a real work's properties could be rendered assertible, teachers would be able to take advantage of the similarity rather than the differences between artworks and other entities students learn about in school. A real artwork has both a configurative and a representational presence united indivisibly by common sense. A real artwork has an origin and a past, a present and a future. It has a persistence and a vulnerability, but not in a way which is dependent upon how students think it is in order for it to exist. An art teacher is able to approach the teaching of a real artwork in the knowledge that the object is already seen to exist by the most naive of students. But that the work is existing, can be addressed by the student in the spirit of finding out, with the same sense of wonder which goes with the exploration of objects in the physical universe.

In a real work (following Putnam, I have rejected metaphysical realism) the myriad of properties relative to it can be accepted without exclusion; its interesting historical facts, its physical nature, its market value, its fashionability, the general ideas and narratives transacted within and about it, its causal effect on oneself, and upon others, its social anthropology, its technical nature and, not least, its aesthetic and representational character (see Wolterstorff [1980, Ch 1] for a discussion on the lack of identity between the aesthetic and art).

Students need to be able to trust their intuitive sense of the existence of the artwork as an entry point into its understanding. Yet even though a work may be complex and well beyond their present comprehension, new insights gained through art learning should come as a cognitive challenge to students rather than as an attack upon their common sense. A real art object affords teachers and students this opportunity.

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